



Career Exploration As a Learning Tool

What is career exploration?

Career exploration is a worksite experience (typically 10 to 30 hours over the course of several days or weeks) during which the student observes and interacts with workers, does hands-on activities, and completes written assignments to learn about the skills and knowledge required at the workplace. If time allows, a student should complete several explorations across a variety of industries or within one industry. This will increase student awareness of a variety of work settings and career areas. Most schools use career exploration for students in the ninth through 12th grades.

What is the purpose?

Career exploration helps a student accomplish the following:

- Broaden awareness of different jobs and careers across industries
- Identify personal interests and abilities
- Begin to decide which careers to investigate further
- Increase self-esteem by engaging in hands-on tasks and interacting with adult workers
- Understand the interrelationships of “all aspects of the industry”
- Develop and apply decision-making and information processing skills
- Develop and practice a variety of basic and employability skills
- Challenge assumptions and stereotypes about different jobs and careers
- Understand the connection between school, work, and achieving goals

What is the employer’s/employee’s role?

The employer’s /employee’s role is to help the student understand whether or not this is a career area of interest to him or her by providing opportunities to observe, do hands-on tasks, and ask questions.

How do you create an effective career exploration in the workplace?

The majority of a student’s time should be spent doing hands-on activities and interacting with employees. Consider the following suggestions:

- Define the methods for exploring the site. Either you can decide alone what the student does at the workplace, or you can include the student in the decision. Talk to the student and find out his or her motivations and interests. Appropriate activities for a student could include:
 - Touring all the departments of the company
 - Following a product or process through its different stages of development
 - Taking minutes at a staff meeting
 - Greeting customers
 - Taking and delivering phone messages
 - Using a computer to write a memo to the staff explaining the purpose of career exploration
 - Doing data entry
 - Estimating costs of ordering supplies

- Outline policies, rules and regulations. Make it clear that the student is expected to conform to company rules, regulations, and policies regarding behavior. Discuss subjects such as dress codes, smoking rules, confidentiality, and health and safety regulations. Allow students to participate in new worker orientation sessions if they are offered at the time of the exploration.
- Encourage conversation and respond to questions. One popular career exploration activity is for student to interview employees. Employees should answer questions frankly because students need to know what they honestly think about their job. Remember, the purpose of career exploration is to help students understand all aspects of the career so they can use this information to make informed decisions about their future.
- Provide relevant literature. Give the student materials related to the worksite such as catalogs, brochures, training materials, reports, and union information. If possible, provide sample job descriptions and information on hiring practices.
- Evaluate the exploration. Please complete the student evaluation form that will be provided to you to assess the exploration and his or her performance. Be honest and specific, providing examples of what the student did well and what he or she needs to improve.

Employer/Employee Checklist

- ☐ Attend an orientation session and/or review materials provided by the school.
- ☐ Schedule and confirm the dates and times of the exploration with the teacher/program coordinator.
- ☐ Identify appropriate hands-on tasks.
- ☐ Inform co-workers that a student will be doing a career exploration.
- ☐ Enlist the help of co-workers willing to let the student observe their work and ask questions as part of the career exploration.
- ☐ Review all relevant health and safety issues and provide all necessary safety gear; review all rules, regulations, and policies.
- ☐ Confirm a back-up employee to supervise the student in the event an emergency takes you away.
- ☐ Evaluate the experience.